

THE NATIONAL ERA.

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VOL. V.—NO. 18.

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, MAY 1, 1851.

THE NATIONAL ERA IS PUBLISHED WEEKLY, AT SEVEN CENTS.

STORY, OPPOSITE OUR FELLOW'S HALL.

TERMS.

Five dollars per annum, payable in advance. Advertisements not exceeding ten lines inserted three times for one dollar; every subsequent insertion, twenty-five cents.

All communications to the Era, whether business or personal, or for the paper or for the printer, should be addressed to G. BAILEY, Washington, D. C.

BUFF & BLANCHARD, PRINTERS.

Sixth street, a few doors south of Pennsylvania Avenue.

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WASHINGTON, APRIL 26, 1851.

For the National Era.

LIFE ON PRAIRIE DE LA FLEUR.—No. II.

By MARY LIVING.

THE FIRST PRAIRIE SINGING-SCHOOL.

"One of us singin' we Musin'!"

"The voice of singin' is not silent in our flower prairie. We have a hand of untrained minstrels in the forest gullary all around, whose trill and chorus are borne sweetly on the spring and summer breeze. The prattle beats the bass drum with his wide whirling wings; the meadow lark punctuates the fife; the bobolink warbles a fine note; and a dozen crows out, and over, and a discordant accompaniment, most like the wail of the wind. The sun, the open sunshines, prairie chickens cluck and coo, usually upon high railroads; and a whole batelion of quails whistles defiance to you through the bending grass that shelters its hidden flight. The hummin-bird and the humm-bee buzz natively from sweet to sweet. Surely I need not add, as a climax, the shrill Lilliputian trumpeter of Night, the tenor-voiced mosquito!"

The very winds sweep organ tones of mystery and sweetnes over and around us, as they hurry past on their way to the ocean. The sunbeams played upon the thunder-heads of morn, till the very Earth is a shudder of awe. At times, with the low, tender, minor chant of the turtle-dove from the wood, a song-whisper of *Yankee* sweetnes, breathed by the soprano of the young leaves of the tree!

But few human voices had lent their music to swell this symphony of Nature. If we except that of the merry *Yankee* boy, who whistles "Yankee Doodle" to the handles of his plough—when one evening in autumn the settlement was electrified by an announcement that a stranger of distinguished reputation was a "singing master" destined to establish a *singing school*—we find the property of this measure. Old Farmer Curtis argued that "it was a money catch, and no use in life; the singer's *Sundays* was smart enough—and what more would he folks be? He would take up with no new-fangled notions."

Many sided with the old farmer—one strengthening his position by the remark that the new master sang "do, re, mi" &c, instead of the good old-fashioned "fa sol la," in endless repetition. And, then, "he wrook music on a black board! What on earth had a black board and chalk to do with singing?"

But the majority of the little community, being better enlightened upon the important subject in question, saw that the opportunity was too valuable to be thrown away. There was scarcely a young person in the scantly filled semi-circle dignified by the title of "sophy," but that one of the stanch old singers who bustled the Sabbath music of the humble sanduary could read musical notes with any degree of readiness. So they were confined to a narrow hedge of old songs, good music and a canary bird, but too often maimed by means of tracheous memories, false ears, and untaught voices. Men, Old Hundred, and Ward, had lost their dignity by far greater familiarity with rough voices, and several lesser tunes seemed in a fair way to share their fate.

"Here are our young people," said the singing-scholastics, "growing up without a tune on their tongues! What will become of the singing-saints when the old folks shall have died off? or removed away?"

The comments and their powers curtailed the day; and in due season, with due respect and for a due recompence of reward, Mr. Sanborn Dulaney was invited to pitch his tent for a time among us, and pitch out juvenile voices into harmony with his tuning-fork.

This tuning-fork, or pitch-pipe, he indifferently termed it, was his chief wile of power. He had a violin, indeed, whose bow he could draw so sedentarily on state occasions, but he could not play it.

He would hold the entire circle of open-mouthed gosses breathlessly listening to its mysterious ring, as he rested it upon the pine table before him, upon the tough knuckles of his left hand, or less frequently upon his whitely glittering front teeth. Then the ascent or descent from that plaintive, mournfully humming *do*—*la*—*so*—to the *tonic*, "do—so—" round out unerringly from the fallen-circle of his lips—it was an unexplained mystery to the greater power of his wondering disciples.

The first meeting, agreeably to appointment, a noisy, roughly convened in the old school-house, that would have moved the finger-ends of Hogarth to caricature it, if Hogarth could have looked upon it.

It had been tacitly understood, by the junors of our community, that they were to have the exclusive benefit of the guineas their fathers should pour into Mr. Dulaney's pocket, and the thrilling notes which he should pour forth in return. But the elders had made no such silent stipulation, and had no idea of being denied the direct reward of their perseverance and expenditure.

They sat—paper and marmas in all-fashions, and all fashions, and in variously shaped, faintly sunshiny gosses—all the novelty—all the most comically anomalous countenances, now fixed on the latching-string of the door, in hurried expectation; now glancing, in a sort of apologetic similitude, over the rather boisterous ranks of youth behind and among them; again awkwardly pecking into a sort of hopped salve, as they joked one another in loud whispers upon their unexpected meeting in the place of innovation.

One drew himself up with dignity, and funned the dog's *ear* of an old plain-book.

"I am—my grandpa's—with a business—"

Another, with a more apologetic air, and panted, intently over the "Boston Academy's Collection," as he attempted to wrangle sweet words from his partner nestled in their seats, or trod their feet impatiently, and wished that "the master would come, and put a stop to the young people's noise."

"The noise," indeed, was on the crescendo among the junors, who very well understood that they were brought together to gratify their vocal organs, and were determined to give them full play.

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